Council backs up Skorman

Anti-gay protesters picket Springs sites, get letter from Rivera

By ED SEALOVER
THE GAZETTE

3-25

When the anti-gay pickets of Westboro Baptist Church returned to Colorado Springs on Thursday, they were met by a new counter-protest — this one from the City Council.

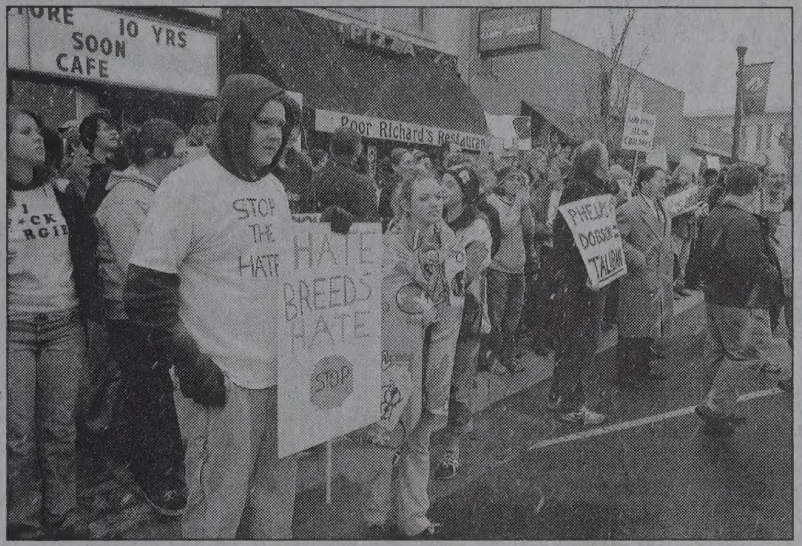
Mayor Lionel Rivera gave the group a letter that said its message is not welcome in the city. Rivera and five council members then joined to denounce church members picketing across from Poor Richard's, Vice Mayor Richard Skorman's downtown restaurant.

Two weeks ago, council members declined Skorman's suggestion to chastise the group, instead reaffirming a previous resolution against hate speech. But the pickets returned to target Skorman and said God hates Colorado Springs. That was enough for city officials.

"I kind of take that personally, and that kind of speech is not welcome in my community," Rivera said.

Sixteen people from the Topeka, Kan.-based church carried signs outside City Hall, 107 N. Nevada Ave., Poor Richard's, 324 N. Tejon St., and the Gay and Lesbian Fund, 315 E. Costilla St., proclaiming "Fags are violent" and "God hates America." Many were children, and almost all are related to church pastor Fred Phelps.

Shirley Phelps-Roper, Phelps' daughter, said they came to deliver a message to Skorman and other gay rights defenders: "It's not OK to be gay."



CAROL LAWRENCE, THE GAZETTE

Counterprotesters gather Thursday in front of Poor Richard's on North Tejon Street to show support for owner Richard Skorman. Anti-gay protesters from the Kansas-based Westboro Baptist Church were across Tejon.

In response to the second picketing by the Kansas church in the past two weeks, local religious leaders met inside City Hall to discuss tolerance.

The anti-gay church members first came to Colorado Springs on March 11 to demonstrate outside Palmer High School, where a group of students has formed a Gay Straight Alliance club.

Hundreds of counterprotesters met them then, and about 20 people turned out Thursday in a snow shower at City Hall and the Gay and Lesbian Fund to show their opposition to the church pickets.

Their number swelled to about 150 at Poor Richard's, where Skorman told them, "This makes me very proud to live in Colorado Springs."

About 30 police officers were at the three locations to escort the protesters.

The Kansas church plans to return to Colorado Springs at the end of April to picket outside the headquarters of Christian ministry Focus on the Family, which it accuses of being too liberal toward gays.

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to pay attorneys' fees to winners, amendment says

bbying from the industry, members se Local Governnittee inserted lanproponents said a chilling effect s involving home- their local associ-

ations. The amendment would allow the winner of any court action to be awarded attorneys' fees, paid by the loser.

With that change, the committee approved Senate Bill 100 unanimously and moved it to the full House.

The bill, supporters say, is in response to restrictive homeowners association rules, including bans on political signs and flying the American flag. The measure also mandates HOAs to be more cooperative with homeowners by providing financial information and additional notification of meetings.

Homeowners Tuesday told committee members horror stories of abuse and mismanagement from their associations and said SB100 is the first step in stopping "runaway HOAs."

Roger Klein, a board member of the Citizens for Preservation of Property Rights in Larimer County, said there is no recourse from HOAs because no one is watching them. He said he has received threatening phone calls and had his property destroyed by his association.

"I used to believe that HOAs were a good thing, but now I am 1,000 percent convinced that they are a bad thing," he said. "They make up rules, treat members badly and misconstrue facts so that members support things that only benefit a few board members."

Critics of the bill said the state should have no role in regulating homeowners associations, whose membership is voluntary.

"Big Brother does not always know best," said Ray Colavita, a HOA board member of the Villas in Cherry Creek.

"I think it's a shame that we have to micromanage at this level," said Rep, Kathleen Curry, D-Gunnison. "I question, in general ... how we're going to enforce a bill like this."

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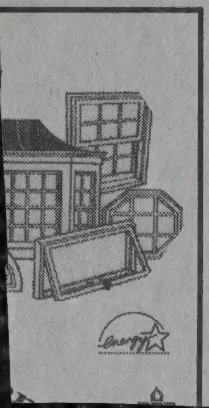

BUDGET: Phone poll changes Stengel's mind

FROM PAGE 1

the state — facing a $234 million shortfall for the 2005-06 budget year and a $188.1 million shortfall for the next year — can rebound from the recent recession.

"This bill proposes to ask the voters to participate with us in building the future of this state," said Sen. Steve Johnson, R-Fort Collins, the Senate sponsor.

Although Gov. Bill Owens and a host of Republicans support the measure, it is opposed by Colorado's most conserva-

dresses are vague and open-ended, and that causes me concern," said Sen. Doug Lamborn, R-Colorado Springs. "We've also had no serious discussion of spending limits here."

Some opposition was expected by the backers of HB1194, but there have been surprises as several GOP House members who last week vowed to support the proposal are reneging now on their promises.

House Minority Leader Joe Stengel, R-Littleton, is the most high-profile flip-flopper

trated there is no talk of spending cuts."

Amendment 23 is the measure that mandates yearly increases for education spending of inflation plus 1 percent. Many conservatives blame Amendment 23 for the state's budget problems because of the way it interacts with TABOR.

Liston, however, sat in a meeting with Owens last week when the governor explicitly said Amendment 23 was off the table and not part of the deal. A few hours later, Liston stood with the governor for a

sioner Douglas Bruce, author of TABOR, said Republicans who back the bill "are going to regret the day they went for this largest money grab in state history."

"It's going to be crushed in November," he said.

But the remaining Republican backers of HB1194 aren't blinking.

"I think in some situations there are considerations of higher office, and they are concerned how the vote might affect them in regard to that," said Rep. Al White, R-Winter Park. "Regardless of what hap